critical digest

Vol V No 20 Jan 26, 1953
The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current NYC & LA Entertainment Scene

Coming NY Theatre Openings

Love's Labour's Lost- City Center 2/4/53. NYC Drama Company presents Shakespeare comedy with Joseph Schildkraut, Kevin McCarthy and Meg Mundy...The Emperor's Clothes- Barrymore 2/9/53. Playwrights Company and Robert Whitehead present George Tabori's new play with Maureen Stapleton and Brandon de Wilde. ...Hazel Flagg-Hellinger-2/11/53. Jule Styne in association with Anthony B Farrell presents new musical with book by Ben Hecht,music by Styne.With Helen Gallagher and Thomas Mitchell.

Diggests of Current NY Theatre Reviews

The Crucible-Martin Beck 1/22/53. All but Kerr,Herald Tribune,found the new Arthur Miller drama,produced by Kermit Bloomgarden, a tense,strong,moving play. Arthur Kennedy, Walter Hampden, E.G. Marshall, Beatrice Straight an rest of large cast were warmly applauded. Some difference of opinion developed if this history of the Salem witch trials applied to present day life or not. Kerr voiced his negative view because he thought the drama took a step backward to mechanical parable,into the sort of play which lives not in the warmth of humbly observed humans souls,but in the ideological heat of polemic. Thus the characters are not made interesting in and for themselves. But Kerr was a minority of one. Atkinson,Times,chalks up another powerful play for Miller, given an equally powerful performance. Neither the author nor the audiences are unaware of certain similarities between the perversions of justice in 1692 and 1953,Times critic notes. Compared to Miller's Death of a Salesman, reviewer though present play had too much excitement and not enough emotion. Chapman,News,rated it a stunning production, splendidly acted and strongly written. But viewers will have to read their own politcal parable into script,he believes. Coleman,Mirror,agreed that script didn't contain any deep implications to the modern playgoer,but was a stirring well acted melodrama. McClain,Journal American,found it a play of enormous strength,written with dept and intelligence,performed by large and expert cast. He sided with those who saw no modern meaning in situation. Though Hawkins,World Telegram & Sun, thought at times script was too theatrically neat, but it remains big and bold and theatrical. Miller,he praised,has made an important advance in the poetic quality of his writing. Watts,Post,listed it is a drama of emotional power and impact. Though it lacks some of the excellence he had expected,the result is a hard hitting and effective play. Director Jed Harris lauded.

Mid Summer-Vanderbilt 1/21/53 . Mild, but unanimous, okays greeted Vina Delmar new comedy presented by Paul Crabtree and Frank J. Hale. Atkinson,Times, summed up his colleagues thoughts on the script by stating that it is an interesting play that always seems on the verge of distinction. Broadway debut of Geraldine Page, a graduate of Off Broadway production of Summer and Smoke, heralded by all critics. Inspite of weak ending, Times man okayed production because of fine acting by Page, Vicki cummings and Mark Stevens, in cast directed by Crabtree. Shipley,New Leader,feared proceedings were a frost,with Cummings always on the brink of Mae West and Page like heroine in Perils of Chinatown.

The Bat- National 1/20/53. Though the thriller part seems to have been drained out, critics okayed present production of Mary Roberts Rinehart famed mystery as acceptable farce. James Withers Elliott production starring Zazu Pitts, Lucille Watson and Shepperd Strudwick,staged by Jonathan Seymour won laurels for fine comedy acting. All but Kerr,Herald Tribune,recommended it for its funny moments, Writing creaks,plot remains as fresh as ever,notes Atkinson,Times. Third act chase found most of audience and critics laughing hard,reports McClain, Journal American. Hawkins,WT&S,thought script still carried elements of suspense.

' Danny Kaye at the Palace '

Wonderful entertainer and entertainment,unable to do anything bad or in bad taste is how the NY drama critics summed up Danny Kaye's All Star International Show which opened at the Palace 1/18/53. Except for a few very minor complaints the daily reviewers loved very moment of show. First half of bill, which includes Peiro Brothers,jugglers, Dunhills dancers, Marquis and family monkey act, Darvas and Julia acrobat dance act,and Fran Warren, tabbed as perfect, though several could have done without the Marquis number.

No one was exaggerating Kaye's genius for entertaining,lauds Atkinson,Times,who rates him as a crisp performer with a quick,satirical mind. Even the musicians were delighted,he notes. Chapman,News,nominated Kaye for a full 4 year term at the Palace, and as the greatest performer he had seen in 40 years of showgoing. Critic believes Kaye who told audience " nobody likes to hear me entertain better than me." The star as no equal with zany songs, reports Coleman,Mirror,who enjoyed his songs from "Hans Christian Anderson" the best. Everyone seems to be having such a good time at this theatre,reviewer wonders why two-a-day vaudeville ever died. Hawkins,World Telegram & Sun,summed it up as "simply great." Minor complaint division headed by McClain, Journal American, who admits the whole performance is professional and entirely engaging by a guy who has nothing but talent,but critic wonders if this is really vaudeville. Kerr,Herald Tribune,enjoyed most of proceedings,but thought Kaye's relaxing in front of footlights to regain his breath was too much. Watts,Post,enjoyed all of it, though he felt a few moments were just a bit arch for some stubborn tastes. Critic also wishes Kaye wouldn't use the microphone. Audiences joining in on nonesense songs noted by all critics, but Cooke,Wall St Journal,couldn't help but wondering if there weren't professional singers planted in audience to lead the singing.

' Off Broadway '

Ah,Wilderness revived by Equity Library Theatre Jan 28-Feb 1...Man and Superman done by Equity Library Theatre Feb 4-8...Finian's Rainbow production by Equity Community Theatre will play at Far Rockaway High School in March...Three in One, production including a comedy,drama and a musical,opens under sponsorship of Ken Parker with cast of 100 at Jan Hus House Feb 5...Originals Only will read original plays by new playwrights on Thursday evenings...Dramatists Forum read The Musicians, a new play by Leon Frengut,member of NBC Symphony Orchestra at Amato Theatre...Dramatic Workshop will hold monthly "Audition Night" to uncover new talent,Shipley,New Leader and dean of school,will be among the judges..."Theodore" continues at Cherry Lane Theatre giving midnight performances weekends...Noone , new play by Zil Orlovitz presented by Intro magazine at Provincetown,panned by Vene,Variety, as a poorly constructed fiasco dealing with incest and delivered in what is probably the most convoluted verse ever to be heard on a stage. Group took ad noting that Rice,Post,had attacked their play... Down in the Valley and Red Peppers twin bill presented at Protestant Episcopal Church, 2 East 90th St...Documentary Theatre of YMHA will stage Nothing Softer Than Water,new play by Arthur Oshlag and David Hooks...Around We Go, new play by Robert Downing,stage manager,will be presented in March at Houston,Texas,Playhouse. Play written for central staging...Strand Theatre used for Servel,Inc, "1953 Show of Stars" matinee for dealers.

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' Green Room Department '

DRAMA'S FUTURE...Theatre's creative artists, like theatre audiences, have tasted boredom in recent years and are beginning to prod the theatre to see where the nerves are,comments Kerr,Herald Tribune Critic don't believe theatre is dying,but instead we are watching the gradual breaking up of our own particular style,the special impulse inherited from Ibsen. When they do find a new shape and the proper modern style,he predicts, it may well be an electrifying one. If at present theatre workers don't know exactly where they are going, they at least know it's time to get a move on, he concluded.

THEATRE ADVICE...Standing room,insists Chapman,News,is the best and easiest place to hear from in most theatres. Planners of new theatres should remember this and not do away with either standing room or standees,the greatest of all theatre fans...If the French Folies Bergere ever does arrive in US, and Nathan,Journal American,is doubtful after reading 28 such announcements, it will be a mistake to do the famed revue in English. The rapture American tourists have experienced for the show is mostly because they can't understand it. And if the nudes are covered up, critic thinks French company might as well stay home.

DRAMA DESK DATA...James Russo and Michael Ellis think they have the high costs of Broadway production beaten, they informed "Drama Desk" luncheon meeting. At their newly acquired Bucks County,Pa,Playhouse they hope to stage new plays at about $5000 each. If one of the scripts is acceptable for Broadway presentation they will feel that their summer's efforts more than paid for itself...Bette Davis, star of the Russo & Ellis revue Two's Company informed Zolotow,Times,that at many times during the show's hectic tryouts she wished the contract had been a forgery. Times drama reporter hadn't believed she had signed contract to do a Broadway musical when producers informed him of this fact last year.

COLUMN TIPS...Eartha Kitt, New Faces, may appear in musical version of The Member of the Wedding, hints Kilgallen...TV promotion firms trying to sell Katharine Hepburn on playing The Millionairess for a one shot closed circuit deal,reports Walker...Hazel Flagg producers denied reports that book being rewritten cutting several parts,notes Sylvester.

EMPIRE'S FINALE..Famed theatre,which will be torn down later this year, deserves a salute on its sixtieth and final birthday, comments Herald Tribune editorial. Theatre which was once considered a risk because it was too far uptown from theatre district at 14th St, is the last theatre below 42nd St. Tearing down of old structure will bring end to distinghished lifetime of providing a home for the century's finest plays and players.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...NY City Theatre stock company of 40 players is an eventual possibility, Albert Marre,newly appointed artistic director of the City Center told Morehouse,World Telegram & Sun...James Withers Elliott, present producer of The Bat, has a small part in the original production [illegible] author Mary Roberts Rinehart,told Rice,Post.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Calta,Times,on 2 week leave for leg operation at Lutheran Hospital,NYC...Colby, Journal of Commerce, on 20 day cruise to Caribbean...Ken Tynan,London Evening Standard, spending month in NYC...Yul Brynner,The King and I, named co-chairman of ANTA Ball at Plaza Hotel Feb 9...Patty Wilkes subbed for Rosalind Russell,Wonderful Town,when later became ill during New Haven tryout...Holly Harris,subbed for Vivienne Segal, Pal Joey,Betty Early for Martha Wright,South Pacfic-both due to laryngitis.

' LA Theatre Reviews & News '

The Constant Wife with Katharine Cornell opens at Biltmore Feb 17...Excerpts from Oedipus Rex ,presented in the original Greek text and with appropriate Hellenic musical motives, will be presented by Greek acaor-dancer Vassos Kanellos at Wilshire Ebell Theatre Feb 22...Players production of Robert E. Sherwood's comedy The Road to Rome won 2 favorable reviews. Schallert,Times,was pleased with new presentation at the Preston Sturgis theatre-restaurant which seemed to get better as play went on. Greene,Examiner,found the spirited acting and tasteful staging made a cheerful event. Critic suggested newcomer Carolyn Jones, a promising young actress,would make her part more persuasive if she would be more patrician and less bird brained. Bongard,News,thought food at re-opened establishment,better than half cooked production. Reviewer blamed lack of competent actors. Considering the show is free with the meal though,the critic admits the viewer gets his money's worth.

' Digests of Current Reviews '

The Love of Four Colonels-Shubert 1/15/53. Mixed reviews filed by weekly critics on merits of Peter Ustinov's comedy presented by Theatre Guild and Aldrich & Myers. All granted that Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer had a field day portraying their variety of roles, with supporting cast headed by Leueen MacGrath, Stefan Schnabel and Robert Coote were generally praised. Matter of discussion was if script is play, or a series of satiric playlets that are vastly overwritten. Colorful,cerebral fairy is how Keating,Cue,rates it. with the playlets scored as two hits,a near miss and a strike-out. The Russian parody was the near miss,while the American segment ,with Harrison as a combination Jimmy Durante and B.S. Pulley,was the flop. Theatre can be fun when in talented hands it discards literal mindedness and appeals to the imagination,notes Hobe, Variety. Though script is imperfect and incompletely satisfying,it is frankly and engagingly theatrical. Second act he considered a let down, party because play's original ending was chopped off. Billboard reviewer,on the other hand, okayed the proceedings as 90% icing and 10% cake, short on moral,but long on fus. Con side headed by Gibbs,New Yorker,who feared that inspite of play being unusual and witty, it is also the most loose and untidy play of the season to date. A catchall for comic themes, it is deft and funny at the start,but becomes bored and coy in the end. Result mighthave been better if he stuck to one theme. Time man is convinced it isn't a play at all, but a series of parodies set inside of a framework of fantasy,which like most jokes that last all evening,would far better keep early hours.

Hits Revisited: Sylvia Sidney and Romney Brent make still another excellent team in The Fourposter, praises Francis,Billboard. Though critic personally believes no one can replace the Cronyns in its, the current duet make it again a happy,tender little play...New Faces of 1952 continues to hold up after 8 months, reports Hobe,Variety. Though some of the material has inevitably dated, much of it remains fresh and funny. Surprisingly enough none of the company has developed star stature.

' Film-Theatre Notes '

Bette Davis,Two's Company, new film"The Star" opens at Rivoli Jan 28.West coast critics predict she will win Oscar for role...George Axelrod and Courtney Burr are considering filming The Seven Year Itch themselves...The Moon Is Blue film version,being made by Otto Preminger and F. Hugh Herbert, is being filed simultaneously with 2 seperate casts,one English,one German...Dick Williams,LA Mirror drama editor,sold two science fiction stories to Sam Katzman to film.